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SUBJECT: DOMESTIC CONCERN OVER ZIMBABWE SIMMERS

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH HUGGINS REASONS 1.5 (B) & (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY: The perception of adverse impact on Botswana of the situation in neighboring Zimbabwe is steadily growing. Debate over what the Government should do to mitigate the costs to the country continues to simmer. During National Assembly debates following President Mogae's November 8 State of the Nation address, parliamentarians highlighted the need for the Government to curb illegal immigration. The press generates a steady stream of stories about the disruption caused by some illegal immigrants from Zimbabwe, including violent crime and cattle rustling. In response to these and other challenges, the GOB is considering a nationwide operation to round up illegal immigrants from Zimbabwe. If this plan materializes, Botswana could encounter international criticism for returning border jumpers to an uncertain future in Zimbabwe. END SUMMARY

CALLS FOR GOB TO DO MORE

2. (U) During parliamentary debates following President Mogae's November 8 State of the Nation address, growing costs of illegal immigration from Zimbabwe emerged as an important concern. The ruling Botswana Democratic Party's (BDP) MP for Tonota South, near Francistown, Pono Moatlhodi, called on the National Assembly to explore ways to curb the influx of illegal immigrants. He blamed Zimbabwean border jumpers for the increased incidence of crime in Botswana. Specially elected MP Botsalo Ntuane, also of the BDP, called for fresh efforts within the region "to deal with the core issues of governance and an enabling political situation in Zimbabwe" in order to avoid further negative spill-over effects for its neighbors.

PERCEIVED COSTS TO BOTSWANA GROWING

3. (U) Augmenting the general perception that illegal immigration from Zimbabwe has caused an increase in crime, recent newspaper accounts referred to allegations of cattle rustling across the border and incidences of violent conflicts in Francistown between supporters of Zimbabwe's opposition Movement for Democratic Change and the ZANU-PF by illegal Zimbabwean migrants. While police officials have reportedly dismissed claims of battles between Zimbabwean partisans in Botswana, they have called for government support to check stock theft. The public in Botswana is not vocal about the situation in Zimbabwe but they increasingly view as negative the impact of illegal migration from Zimbabwe on Botswana.

ILLEGAL IMMIGRANT ROUND-UP IN THE OFFING?

4. (C) During a November 23 courtesy call, the new Minister for Labor and Home Affairs Moeng Pheto highlighted for the Ambassador the economic and administrative problems associated with illegal immigration from Zimbabwe. He observed that such migrants had spread throughout the country, taking jobs far below the legal minimum wage, thereby exacerbating the problem of unemployment for Botswana. Overcrowding in Botswana's prisons, which he estimated to be at 1,500 to 2,500 above the total capacity of 3,500, derived in part from the holding of Zimbabweans, he claimed. According to Minister Pheto, the GOB is considering a nation-wide "sweep" operation to round up Zimbabweans who are in Botswana illegally. Plans along these lines had been stalled, he explained, by the absence of sufficient space in which to hold would-be detainees. He added that efforts are underway to set up such facilities, which might include the use of tents at existing prisons.

COMMENT

5. (C) While the spillover effect from the situation in Zimbabwe has not yet reached a crisis point in Botswana, pressure is steadily growing on the GOB to take more

effective measures to mitigate negative impacts. More assertive action by the GOB in support of a democratic transition in Zimbabwe is unlikely but new measures to control border jumping and the problems it creates are probably forthcoming. While it is unclear how many of these border jumpers back the MDC, and considering the ongoing food crisis in Zimbabwe, Botswana risks international criticism for returning them to an uncertain future in Zimbabwe.

HUGGINS